

The Listening Post
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Welcome to Issue 5 of *The Listening Post*, CDR's monthly digest of authoritative scholarship, debates and podcasts published over the course of the month on global, regional and Australian defence and strategic issues. *The Listening Post* provides an easy access repository of articles, commentary and analysis on major defence and strategic policy issues, and it examines some of the most prominent problems and debates for senior ADF personnel and Defence civilians working on issues related to Australian strategic policy.

The West, the rest and sanctions on Russia

Amongst the flurry of commentary and analysis on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its geopolitical fallout, the response of much of the world beyond the developed West has received relatively little attention. The default position seems to be either that such states will either eventually follow the West's lead or, more dismissively, that they ultimately don't matter. Prime Minister Scott Morrison at his [speech](#) to the Lowy Institute on 7 March assumed the first of these positions that largely [conflates](#) what to date is a largely US and European-led effort to sanction Russia as a global response.

Yet as India's [abstention](#) from UN Security Council voting to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrates much of the world beyond the developed West remains uncommitted. This is not a sign that such states are sympathetic (although some isolated examples are) to Russia but rather that the interaction of their interests and values determines either opposition to, or equivocation on, Western-led efforts at coercion of a sovereign state. The examples of some of the world's largest democracies, such as [South Africa](#), [Mexico](#) and Brazil provide neat examples how a simple binary narrative of democracy versus autocracy to understand global responses to Russia's invasion are largely unhelpful.

However, India's response perhaps illustrates most clearly how a state's interests may determine outcomes not entirely in alignment with professed values. New Delhi, for all its recent involvement in Western-oriented dialogues such as the Quadrilateral Security Initiative, remains hesitant about damaging relations with Moscow. This is for a very immediate set of reasons. Russia remains one of India's top arms suppliers, with some [70%](#) of the Indian military's arsenal of Russian origin, making it in the short-term reliant on Russian parts. While US [arms sales](#) – some US\$20 billion in 2020 – now outpace those of Russia, Washington so far remains a less than ideal arms supplier for India due to the fact that, while often at the leading edge of technology, American arms are expensive and American suppliers have proven unwilling to engage in technology transfer to India. Russian arms, in contrast, remain cheaper and Russian suppliers are uninhibited when it comes to technology transfer with the [result](#) that the “bulk of India's license-based defense manufacturing comes from Russia”. New Delhi also remains wary of alienating Moscow amidst what it sees as its enduring strategic competition with Beijing. As such it is in



India's [interest](#) "to ensure that Russia does not side with China in India-China disputes".

Finally, there is also the historical legacy of close Soviet/Russia-India relations. Here, as the former editor-in-chief of *The Hindu*, [N. Ram](#), notes, "For tens of millions of ordinary Indians, as well as for a large section of political decision-makers, virtually regardless of their ideological orientation, the Soviet Union—and, after its break-up, the Russian Federation—has been the all-weather friend and strategic ally whose unconditional loyalty and trustworthiness have stood the test of time". An oft-cited example in this context is Moscow's use during the Cold War of its veto to parry UN Security Council resolutions – usually sponsored by Washington – condemning India on Kashmir and Pakistan. While US-India relations have of course warmed considerably since the 1990s, India nonetheless conceives of that relationship to be based primarily on interests and not values. Prominent Indian journalist [Siddharth Varadarajan](#) argues here that while both the US and Russia "have cast the conflict in Ukraine in grand terms" (e.g. Putin's assertion of "de-militarising" Ukraine and the Biden administration's claim to be defending the "rules-based global order"), such "principles are never applied to other situations of foreign occupation and aggression where human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law are taking place". As such he deems the conflict in Ukraine to be the "unfortunate outcome of a clash between two great powers with lingering ambitions of hegemony".

Further reading

David Adler, "The west v Russia: why the global south isn't taking sides", *The Guardian*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/10/russia-ukraine-west-global-south-sanctions-war>

Husain Haqqani and Arpana Pande, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Is Putting India in the Hot Seat", *World Politics Review*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/30386/the-ukraine-war-is-putting-russia-india-relations-in-the-spotlight>

N. Ram "Why India's refusal to condemn Putin shouldn't surprise you", *Prospect Magazine*, 9 March 2022, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/why-indias-refusal-to-condemn-putin-shouldnt-surprise-you-ukraine>

Siddharth Varadarajan, "Ten Theses on the War in Ukraine and the Challenge for India", *The Wire*, 3 March 2022, <https://thewire.in/world/ten-theses-on-the-war-in-ukraine-and-the-challenge-for-india>

KJU kickstarting new brinkmanship on the Korean Peninsula?

Late last month the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) conducted two ballistic missile tests. [According](#) to an senior US official "the U.S. government has concluded that the DPRK's two ballistic missile tests...involved a relatively new intercontinental ballistic missile system that the DPRK is developing". This comes on the back of a marked increase in DPRK weapons testing. January 2022, in particular [saw](#) DPRK undertake two hypersonic missile tests, multiple short, medium and intermediate



range missile tests, and a number of cruise missile tests. Additionally, as Jeffrey Lewis [noted](#) on 7 March, there are also indications of new construction activities at DPRK's nuclear testing site, Punggye-ri, with one possibility that "North Korea plans to bring the test site back to a state of readiness to resume nuclear explosive testing, consistent with the statement North Korea issued in January to 'examine the issue of restarting all temporarily-suspended activities'".

Some have [speculated](#) that DPRK supreme leader, Kim Jong-un (KJU), is experiencing "relevance-deprivation syndrome" and is simply seeking to remind the world, and the United States in particular, that DPRK remains a power to be taken seriously. In this latter context the increase in DPRK testing may be a gambit to compel the Biden administration to reengage with Pyongyang. While former President Donald Trump infamously enthused that he and KJU "[fell in love](#)" during US-DPRK talks in 2018, his successor has thus far proved to be a less willing suitor. The Biden administration's DPRK policy review completed in April 2021 in fact pointedly [adopted](#) what was termed a "calibrated and practical" approach that, in President Biden's words, would be [based](#) on "stern diplomacy and deterrence".

With many other pressing issues – including Russia's invasion of Ukraine - landing on the White House in-tray, it is perhaps unsurprising that DPRK has slipped down in the administration's priorities. Yet, this some observers have [suggested](#), could be a good thing as the "U.S. has little incentive to give in to the DPRK's demands". By demonstrating the continued development of DPRK missile capabilities however KJU may be attempting to disabuse the administration of this assumption.

A broader consideration that may lay behind these DPRK activities too could be KJU's perception of the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the US-led response. Here, there are at least two potential considerations at play for KJU. First, Putin's aggression against Ukraine [is](#) "likely perceived as another cautionary tale by Pyongyang—a lesson of what happens to states without nuclear weapons in the face of conflict with more powerful nuclear-armed adversaries". Second, KJU may also perceive the evident deterioration of US relations with both Russia and China as providing an [advantageous](#) moment to renew DPRK missile, and potentially, nuclear weapons testing. Not only is the Biden administration distracted responding to the Ukrainian situation, but Beijing may be amenable to shielding Pyongyang from any pressure applied by the US and its allies.

An alternate view however is that KJU's renewed brinkmanship is largely irrelevant as it does little to change the strategic balance. Here, not only does American conventional and nuclear capability dwarf anything Pyongyang can muster but its cycles of missile (and nuclear) testing have spurred Japan and South Korea to deploy missile defence systems. Thus, as [Denny Roy](#) asserts, while improvements in DPRK missile capabilities "reinforce North Korea's deterrence against the U.S. or South Korea launching a discretionary war of regime change" they ultimately "do not give Pyongyang a first-strike capability. In short, the missile upgrades matter little, so they confer little leverage".



Further reading

Brad Lendon and Yoongjung Seo, “Kim Jong Un wants the world to know he still matters. Seven missile tests in a month may prove it”, *CNN*, 31 January 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/30/asia/north-korea-missile-tests-analysis-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

Hyun-wook Kim, “A Korean Perspective on the Biden Administration’s North Korea Policy”, *Stimson Center Policy Memo*, 28 February 2022, <https://www.stimson.org/2022/a-korean-perspective-on-the-biden-administrations-north-korea-policy/>

Sangsoo Lee, “North Korea Is Joining China and Russia in Confronting the US”, *38 North*, 2 March 2022, <https://www.38north.org/2022/03/north-korea-is-joining-china-and-russia-in-confronting-the-us/>

Michelle Kae and Jenny Town, “North Korea’s Latest Missile Tests Reflect Kim’s Shifting Priorities”, *World Politics Review*, 8 March 2022, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/30379/for-kim-north-korea-s-missile-tests-reflect-shifting-priorities>

Tianran Xu, “January 2022: Missile Tests of the DPRK”, *Open Nuclear Network*, 31 January 2022, <file:///C:/Users/mecla/Downloads/Xu-January%202022-Missile%20Tests%20of%20the%20DPRK-31%20Jan%202022.pdf>

Denny Roy, “North Korea is Irrelevant Again”, *The Diplomat*, 23 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/north-korea-is-irrelevant-again/>

The ‘Arc of Autocracy’

The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine has served as but the latest opportunity for Prime Minister Morrison to develop his government’s preferred narrative about international strategic dynamics. With Putin’s aggression as the backdrop, the Prime Minister asserted during a [speech](#) to the Lowy Institute on 7 March 2022 that Australia faces a “new arc of autocracy” that is “instinctively aligning to challenge and reset the world order” to create “a transactional world, devoid of principle, accountability and transparency”. While not explicitly identifying the members of this “arc”, there is little doubt that it is Beijing and Moscow that are viewed as imperiling Australian and international security.

China, in particular, was singled out for particular opprobrium here. Morrison noted during Q&A with Michael Fullilove that there has not only been a “chilling silence” from Beijing on the Russian invasion but the granting of “an economic lifeline” to Putin by China’s easing of import restrictions on Russian grain. Moreover, the Prime Minister deemed Sino-Russian alignment to be “an instinctive relationship” rather than a “strategic one”. The implication here is clear: China’s alignment with Russia is *unthinking* and determined by their shared authoritarianism. This ignores the considerable [evidence](#) that Sino-Russian alignment has been built on the basis of a conscious calculation of [mutual interest](#) and, as we detailed in this month’s [Looking Glass: Beijing’s Moscow Muddle](#), glosses over Beijing’s own misgivings about the implications of the Russian invasion.



But it is nonetheless consistent with what has become the preferred strategic narrative of the Morrison government and [those](#) that amplify it in the Australian commentariat: it is China's authoritarianism rather than its increased power that is at the root of its threat to the "rules based order".

Yet, as noted above, there are a significant number of states that have equivocated on either condemning Russia or joining US and European-led sanctions against it. Some of Australia's neighbours in [Southeast Asia](#) such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand fall within this category. Indonesia, for instance, while condemning the "clear violation of territorial integrity and sovereignty" of Ukraine by Russia, nonetheless called on "all sides to prioritise negotiation and diplomacy to stop conflict and put forward a peaceful resolution". Foreign Ministry spokesman, Teuku Faizasyah, [stated](#) that Indonesia "will not blindly follow the steps taken by another country. We will make a decision based on our domestic interests and (the consideration) of whether sanctions would solve anything. We see time and time again that sanctions do not mean the resolution of a particular issue."

The problem, here, however is that while the binary of "democracy versus authoritarianism" may be morally appealing it is neither [analytically](#) useful in helping us understand contemporary international security challenges nor likely to serve Australia's interests in crafting greater regional cooperation in Asia to deter China. Indeed, at the very least, while many of Australia's Asian neighbours have good cause to be concerned by China's assertiveness and welcome continued US forward presence, they also remain interdependent on the Chinese economy.

The [noted](#) lack of any [coherent](#) US economic strategy in Asia stands in contrast to China's economic presence. This absence is a major weakness for any attempt to counter real (and perceived) Chinese influence. "Despite serious questions about China's stagnating economy", Patrick M. Cronin [notes](#), "it is still seen as the region's economic engine" with BRI presenting "deals in the tens of billions of dollars" while the "US counters with promises of 'high-quality' infrastructure" and "China engages regional multilateral trade pacts (joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, requesting accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership)" as "Washington promises a still amorphous Indo-Pacific economic framework".

Further reading

James Laurencson, "Why an 'arc of autocracies' is a stretch", *Policy Forum*, 7 March 2022, <https://www.policyforum.net/why-an-arc-of-autocracies-is-a-stretch/>

Ryan Haas, "Ukraine an opportunity to test China's strategic outlook", *East Asia Forum*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2022/03/10/ukraine-an-opportunity-to-test-chinas-strategic-outlook/>

Yuen Yuen Ang, "The False Dichotomy of Autocracy and Democracy", *Asialink*, 29 October 2020, <https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/insights/the-false-dichotomy-of-autocracy-and-democracy>



Robert Daly, “China and the United States: It’s a Cold War, but don’t panic”, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist*, 10 March 2022, <https://thebulletin.org/premium/2022-03/china-and-the-united-states-its-a-cold-war-but-dont-panic/>

Patrick M. Cronin, “US’ Indo-Pacific Strategy - strengths and potential pitfalls”, *The Straits Times*, 19 February 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/us-indo-pacific-strategy-strengths-and-potential-pitfalls>

Van Jackson, “The threat to economic hegemony is economic hegemony, part II”, *Duck of Minerva*, 12 February 2022, <https://www.duckofminerva.com/2022/02/the-threat-to-economic-hegemony-is-economic-hegemony-part-ii.html>

Resources on Putin’s invasion of Ukraine

Obviously – due to the nature of the war – information on the progress of the conflict in Ukraine is ever-changing. Twitter is probably the best (and at the same time probably also the worst!) resource for up-to-the-minute information on the conflict. Below we have put together a compendium of resources that include (i) reporting on recent developments in the war; (ii) examinations of broader geopolitical and economic implications; and (iii) resources with an Australian strategic policy flavour. We have largely avoided Russian sources, which are really only useful for either shock or comedy value, with the exception of those seen as authoritative and generally as independent as possible. Some Ukrainian resources are included: claims made here should always be independently confirmed before being treated as authoritative.

Regular updates about developments in the war

We recommend Michael Kofman (@KofmanMichael) for his informative assessments of Russian and Ukrainian performance and strategy. For astonishingly regular updates on war damage, videos from citizen reporters and commentary on the war, Rob Lee (@RALee85) is also worth following. The former and recently retired COMADC, MAJGEN Mick Ryan (@warinthefuture) has been putting out daily situation updates, with detailed analysis of the progress of Russian forces in particular. Meanwhile, urban warfare specialist John Spencer (@SpencerGuard) has been in high demand, even tweeting tips to Ukrainian forces about how best to harass and delay advancing Russian forces in cities and towns.

For news out of Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities, especially focusing on the human cost, the Australian war correspondent for the Australian Financial Review Misha Zelinsky (@mishazelinsky) has been reporting tirelessly on the war from Lviv. His podcast @DiplomatesShow is also worth a listen. Less consistently accurate but certainly ubiquitous are the Kyiv Independent (@KyivIndependent) and NEXTA (@nexta_tv).

Others – who can be first to break news but are also sometimes incorrect – include ELINT News (@ELINTNews), OSINT Defender (@OSINTDefender), and Ukraine Weapons Tracker (@UAweapons).



We recognise naturally that there are many other sources out there. These are just our personal suggestions.

Examinations of the broader geopolitical/economic situation

Staying with Twitter we recommend the following for assessments of geopolitics, great power relations, economic impacts, law, cyber and other related topics:

- Ian Bond (@CER_IanBond)
- Natasha Kuhrt (@NKurht)
- Shashank Joshi (@shashj)
- Ruth Deyermond (@ruth_deyermond)
- Michael Weiss (@michaeldweiss)
- Jade McGlynn (@jademcglynn122)
- Sergei Radchenko (DrRadchenko)
- Nigel Gould-Davis (@Nigelgd1)
- Ben Noble (@Ben_H_Noble)
- Seva Gunitsky (@SevaUT)
- Keir Giles (@KeirGiles).

News services and analysts reporting on Russia that are constantly struggling with Kremlin bans include:

- the Meduza Project (@meduza_en)
- Alexander Gabuev (@AlexGabuev)
- Dmitri Trenin (@DmitriTrenin)
- Max Seddon (@maxseddon)
- Anton Barbashin (@ABarbashin).

Some of these can at times reflect sanitised or 'official' positions.

Oh, and for satire in these dark times we wholeheartedly recommend Darth Putin (@DarthPutinKGB).

Meanwhile, the list of Australian voices with a degree of knowledge or expertise on Russia who are tweeting on the war includes

- (shameless plug here!) Matthew Sussex (@matthew_sussex)
- Robert Horvath (@RGHorvath)
- Will Partlett (@WPartlett)
- Linda Mottram (@LindaMottram)
- Stephen Dziedzic (@stephendziedzic)

Among many others of course.

Resources with an Australian / Indo-Pacific strategic policy flavour

Although some of the accounts above also examine this theme, there are some who are following the war specifically with a focus on Australia, Asia and/or the Indo-Pacific. They include

- (another shameless plug here) Michael Clarke (@meclarke114)



- John Blaxland (@JohnBlaxland1)
- Malcolm Davis (Dr_M_Davis)
- Van Jackson (@WonkVJ)
- Liz Buchanan (@BuchananLiz)
- Nick Bisley (@NickBisley)
- Ashley Townshend (@ashleytownshend); and
- Ian Hall (@DrlanHall).

Writing on the Russian invasion

There are an awfully large number of hot takes, lukewarm takes and other earnest writings on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Some of them are worthwhile, but almost all will have a limited shelf life. Hence here we try and cut through the chaff by focusing on key debates that will have relevance to Europe, Asia and Australia beyond the next few weeks.

- *On the capabilities of Russia's military*
Isaac Chotiner, 'The Russian Military's Debacle in Ukraine', *New Yorker*, March 11, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-russian-militarys-debacle-in-ukraine>.
Helene Cooper et al, 'As Russia's Military Stumbles, its Adversaries Take Note', *New York Times*, March 7, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/us/politics/russia-ukraine-military.html>.
David French, 'Russia's initial failures don't mean Ukraine will survive', *The Atlantic*, March 1, 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/03/russian-military-power-weakness-ukraine/623323/>.
'The Curious Case of Russia's Missing Air Force', *Economist*, March 8, 2022. <https://www.economist.com/interactive/2022/03/08/curious-case-russias-missing-air-force>.
- *On the risks of a wider war with NATO (including debate over a No Fly Zone)*
Nigel Gould-Davies, 'Putin's Strategic Failure and the Risk of Escalation', *IISS Military Balance Blog*, March 1, 2022. <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2022/03/putin-strategic-failure>.
Richard K. Betts, 'The No-Fly Zone Delusion', *Foreign Affairs*, March 10, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-03-10/no-fly-zone-delusion>.
Justin Bronk, 'A Ukraine No-Fly Zone would be ineffective, dangerous and a gift to Putin', *RUSI Commentary*, March 10, 2022. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/ukraine-no-fly-zone-would-be-ineffective-dangerous-and-gift-putin>.
Michael Kofman et al, 'The War in Ukraine after two weeks', *Wilson Centre / Kennan Institute*, March 9, 2022. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/russian-war-ukraine-situation-after-two-weeks>



Emma Ashford and Michael Kroenig, 'Would Putin use Nuclear Weapons?', *Foreign Policy*, March 11, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/11/putin-russia-nuclear-weapons-ukraine-war-no-fly-zone/>.

Robin Wright, 'The growing fear of a wider war between Russia and the West', *New Yorker*, March 10, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-growing-fear-of-a-wider-war-between-russia-and-the-west>.

- *On giving Putin an 'off-ramp'*

Eric Sand and Suzanne Freeman, 'The Russian Sanctions Regime and the Risks of Catastrophic Success', *War on the Rocks*, March 8, 2022.

<https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/the-russian-sanctions-regime-and-the-risk-of-catastrophic-success/>.

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<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/03/strategy-west-needs-beat-russia/626962/>.

Jane Vaynman and Tristan A. Volpe, 'Making Coercion Work', *War on the Rocks*,

March 11, 2022. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/making-coercion-work-against-russia/>.

- *On China's role in the conflict*

Joseph Torigian, 'China's Balancing Act on Russian Invasion of Ukraine Explained' *The Conversation*, March 11, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/chinas-balancing-act-on-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-explained-178750>.

Seth Cropsey, 'Russia's Failure is China's Gain', *Wall Street Journal*, March 9, 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-failure-china-gain-ukraine-nato-geopolitical-competition-cold-war-allies-beijing-invasion-expansion-war-11646834842>.

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Richard Weitz, 'In Ukraine crisis China chooses Russia ties over principles', *World Politics Review*, March 11, 2022.

<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13621/global-insights-in-ukraine-crisis-china-chooses-russia-ties-over-principles>.

- *On lessons (if any) for future conflict in Taiwan*

Bonnie Glaser and Jude Blanchette, 'Ukraine war should counsel Chinese caution on Taiwan', *Wall Street Journal*, March 10, 2022.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-war-chinese-caution-taiwan-russia-china-putin-xi-jinping-invasion-sovereignty-11646769700>.



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John Fitzgerald, 'Russia-Ukraine war shows Australia can't be caught short if China invades Taiwan' *The Strategist*, March 11, 2022. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/russia-ukraine-war-shows-australia-cant-afford-to-be-caught-short-if-china-invades-taiwan/>.

Hilton Yip, 'Taiwan is rethinking defense in wake of Ukraine invasion', *Foreign Policy*, February 28, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/28/taiwan-defense-ukraine-invasion/>.

Denny Roy, "Ukraine invasion doesn't mean Taiwan is next", *Asia Times*, 7 March 2022, <https://asiatimes.com/2022/03/ukraine-invasion-doesnt-mean-taiwan-is-next/>



